



Not Your Average Library

High-Tech New Carlisle-Olive Township Public Library, IN,
Strives to Be “More Than Four Walls and a Bunch of Books”

“We’re here to serve. We’re a small community, and we know the people we serve. If someone has a problem, we’re here to help. If you’re supposed to take an online test, and your computer has died, give us a call. By the time you arrive, we’ll have a laptop with Internet connection set up in one of the private study rooms. If you can’t physically get to the library, just call us up and we’ll mail you audio books. If you’re on the go, and would prefer to IM us with questions about resource availability or an event time rather than call, shoot us an IM and we’ll answer you that way too.”

—Stephen Boggs, Library Director, New Carlisle-Olive Township Public Library, IN

What do you call a 26,000-square-foot building outfitted with a 52-inch plasma flat-screen television, the Nintendo Wii, PlayStation2 and X-Box 360 game systems, 8 additional desktop computers loaded with more games, 14 laptops with wi-fi access and a café well stocked with candy bars, potato chips, sodas and cappuccinos?

No matter what you’d call it, we think we know how a lot of teens would characterize it: a dream come true.

Hard as it is to believe, teens in New Carlisle, Indiana, just call it the public library. That’s right, what you might have been sure was the very anathema to every *Halo 3*-addicted, Red Bull-chugging, shush-averse adolescent that’s ever unleashed a victory yawp after an epic piece of gaming is the hippest place in town.

“Out-of-the-box thinking”

Library Director Stephen Boggs appreciates the compliment. He’s gotten it a lot, both from his young patrons and from other Indiana librarians that make field trips to his library for ideas to take back home. But he’s not patting himself on the back. According to him, “This is just the basic standard for what every library should consider.”

While other libraries have recently been making headlines for loaning video games to their patrons, that service is old hat to New Carlisle-Olive Township. By the time the renting of non-book media such as movie and music was adopted by many libraries across the country in the early and mid-90s, New Carlisle-Olive Township had been doing it for a decade.



Education Networks of America



Explains Boggs, who's been with the New Carlisle-Olive Township Public Library for 24 years, "Just because we're in the country doesn't mean we can't be progressive. Look, New Carlisle has 2,000 people. Our legal service area includes Olive Township, so that's another 2,000. Because of the school corporation, we grant service to another 5,000. That's 9,000 people on a good day. If a library of our small size can do it, someone else can get out there and do it. If I don't see this at the next place I go, I can't help but think that they could benefit from some out-of-the-box thinking."

An open invitation to gaming

Because of the high-tech setup and the resulting ability to easily evolve their service offerings, New Carlisle-Olive Township knew exactly what to do when they unexpectedly received a donation to the kid's program a few years ago. Tragically, a teen that had frequently used and very much loved the library had died, and his parents had raised money for a gift to the library in his honor. New Carlisle-Olive Township matched those funds and created a game room with a big-screen television and video game systems for patrons 13 years old and up. Boggs guesses that 500 to 1,000 different kids use this sensationally popular game room each year. Some of their favorite games include *Guitar Hero* and *Dance Dance Revolution*.

Realizing that different patrons seek different experiences from their library stay, Boggs and his colleagues decided on a V-shaped construction, with the end of one arm for adults and the other end of the opposite arm for children and families. They included private study rooms, a 50-person activity room, a large meeting room that can accommodate 127 patrons, a fireplace and the Pirates Cove Café, named in homage to the popularity of *The Pirates of the Caribbean* films. "Throughout," says Boggs, "every room was designed to be as adaptable as possible to the things we could envision offering in our library plus the things we couldn't yet foresee."

To undergird that vision, the library was wired with Cat 6 cabling with the potential for 440 Internet drops. When it became apparent that his single T1 line was inadequate, ENA installed an additional T1, providing more bandwidth, and he's been very happy with his network's performance ever since.



"We know we're not going to use all of our bandwidth even at 3 o'clock when all the kids show up after school," he says. "Right now we generally run at about half capacity, which is about where we should be."

A librarian-planned space

The room expanded the library's already substantial gaming offering: four computers loaded with games dedicated to the teen program and the Nintendo 64, PlayStation and four non-Internet computers with age-appropriate games such as the *Harry Potter* series and *Barbie as Rapunzel* for the exclusive use of kids up to sixth grade. Besides those gaming computers, there are also 10 more terminals for general use and 14 laptops for in-library checkout to patrons of high school age or older.

"More than four walls and a bunch of books"

The philosophy behind all the games, comforts and lax rules (patrons can have drinks anywhere in the library, and Boggs admits that it can get kind of noisy in the kids and family end of the library)?

"More than four walls and a bunch of books"

"We prefer to look at ourselves as more of a community center than

just four walls with a bunch of books on the inside,” explains Boggs. When asked if his library is concerned about the educational or cognitive skills value of video games, one of the justifications that some libraries have been making for offering them to their patrons, he says no. “We don’t concern ourselves with what it is they do, just as long as whatever they are doing, within tactfulness and reason, is here. Far better for kids to be here than wandering the streets.”

But the noise? Isn’t the library the last sanctuary for a little peace and quiet?

For Boggs, maintaining the convivial atmosphere of his library is far more important than respecting a passé tradition. “The fact is, these energetic kids are our future taxpayers and parents, so the better image and deportment we give them now, the better we can depend upon their fond thoughts in the future when we need their assistance,” says Boggs. “Some memories are burned into your head forever. I mean, ask yourself, if you were being constantly hushed and reprimanded in the library as a 13-year-old, are you really going to come back as an adult and patronize the place? I don’t think so. You’re going to Barnes & Noble.”

An all-inclusive library

He points out that the video games and influx of kids have not frightened his older patrons away. If anything, there’s more patrons than ever, of all ages.

He cites the Hook and Needle club of twenty ladies that meets at his library once a week to sew, crochet and talk. The group used to meet at the county library, but they left because they were continually told to keep it down. They haven’t missed a day at Boggs’ new library since it opened.

Parents of young children are particularly thrilled with the library’s supportive, nurturing environment. “So many have told us that they much prefer our library to the strict, unbending one they grew up with,” says Boggs. “Here, we cater to the family lifestyle.” Here, a young child can play in the toy area while her older seven-year-old sibling plays video games on one of the dedicated computers, and it’s all within what Boggs calls the “visual control” of the parents. There’s a family restroom nearby complete with a built-in baby-changing station and a rocking chair for nursing mothers. “The children have a chance to roam a bit, yet parents can easily keep an eye on their wee ones here,” says Boggs.

Should a child still manage to wander off, there’s another safety net. Kids must pass two circulation stations prior to exiting the building, and parents appreciate that feature.

If this doesn’t sound like the kind of space you’d like to disappear into for some solitary quiet time, Boggs suggests that “you go grab your cappuccino or hot chocolate, find your book or magazine or

check out a laptop, and go curl up in front of the fireplace in the adult area of the library on the opposite side of the building. It’s quiet over there.”

“We’re here to serve,” sums up Boggs. “We’re a small community, and we know the people we serve. If someone has a problem, we’re here to help. If you’re supposed to take an online test, and your computer has died, give us a call. By the time you arrive, we’ll have a laptop with Internet connection set up in one of the private study rooms. If you can’t physically get to the library, just call us up and we’ll mail you audio books. If you’re on the go, and would prefer to IM us with questions about resource availability or an event time rather than call, shoot us an IM and we’ll answer you that way too.”

Goals aren’t meant to be realized

So what’s next for the New Carlisle-Olive Township Public Library?

For starters, they’re going to purchase another Nintendo Wii and another big-screen television, this time for seniors. The library hosts a group of senior citizens called TOPS, for Take Off Pounds Sensibly, that meets once a week to discuss exercise and healthy eating.

“They’re going to play tennis and golf on the Wii because it’s low-impact yet still exercise,” explains Boggs. “These people can’t afford to trip or fall doing the real thing, so the Wii is perfect.”

Soon, the library will begin subscribing to Xbox Live so that the teens can play Xbox over the Internet. There are now two New Carlisle-Olive Township Public Library blogs, but Boggs hopes to increase





the chatter on those and would like to see some library footage, photography and information on YouTube, Flickr and MySpace. He even plans to put a camera on the roof so that natives can go online and get a glimpse of home no matter where they happen to live or be traveling.

Choose your own library definition

“You just never know what you’re going to find unless you get in here,” quips Boggs. Then he expands, this time on a more serious note. “Our goal is to serve our community,” says Boggs. “You can never fully satisfy a goal. You can satisfy an objective, but we

don’t want to ever fulfill our goals. Because of that, we’re always improving.” His very definition of a library isn’t finite or precise. He offers keywords. “Inspirational and educational. Entertaining and comforting. A place for curiosity and socializing. Take those and build your own definition.”

It’s a challenge for his patrons—and for any other library that’s maintained what he would describe as a traditional mindset. One thing’s for sure. Building their own definition of the library is certainly the tactic his patrons employ each time they walk through New Carlisle-Olive Township Public Library’s doors.

About ENA

ENA is a leading managed network service provider in the design, deployment and management of network and communication services for school systems, libraries and governments. In 1996, ENA created one of the first statewide K-12 networks in the U.S. and has earned a reputation as experts in distributed networks and voice solutions. Today, ENA manages multiple statewide and district-wide education and library networks, successfully serving over 450 school districts, 2 million students, educators and administrators, and over 300 libraries. For more information, please visit www.ena.com.



Education Networks of America

www.ena.com

866.615.1101